

A

THIRD LETTER

FROM

The Rev. ROBERT HAWKER, D. D.

VICAR OF CHARLES, PLYMOUTH,

TO

The Rev. R. POLWHELE,

VICAR OF MANACCAN, CORNWALL.

Not rendering—railing for railing. 1 Pet. iii. 9.

PLYMOUTH:

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A

THIRD LETTER, &c.

Charles Vicarage, Plymouth,
September 29, 1800.

REV. SIR,

IT was not until the latter end of the last month that I heard of your having announced to the public a *third* Letter on the subject of our controversy. And never till this morning have I been able to procure a sight of it; and that only from a copy lent me.

I had pleased myself with the hope, from the long suspension of your hostilities, that the mildness with which I have treated your unprovoked displeasure, had had the desired effect, in cooling down the flame of such unreasonable resentment, and that the effervescence of a mind so angry would have boiled over no more. But it should seem that the relentless persecution of a man who hath

never injured you, is, in the modern acceptation of Mr. Polwhele's divinity, the truest interpretation of *doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God.*

Be this as it may however, every renewed instance of your attention to me, of what sort soever it may be, (and certainly it must be always of that sort which is most congenial to your character, to bestow) demands an early acknowledgment. I should be wanting in duty to myself, and still more to the higher claim the honorable cause I am engaged to defend, hath upon me, were I to suffer a moment's loss of time in making a suitable reply to it.---Indeed, a dispute with Mr. Polwhele on any subject which hath the remotest connection with theology, can require no time for deliberation.

Your conduct in making your appeal to the Bishop of Exeter, by way of calling in his Lordship's authority to your aid, carries with it an exact uniformity to the malice which you have all along manifested in the controversy, and only speaks out a little more plainly what was your original design. So that when you tell the public that this is your *last* effort, it is only in other words saying, "I have now aimed the most deadly blow I can."---Naturalists inform us, that the serpent never emits his poison

poison so copiously as in his dying pangs. *Nunquam nisi moriens producitur in longum.*

You will forgive me, I hope, when I say, that the title-page of this *third* Letter of your's made me smile. For it brought to my recollection the circumstance which I charged you with in my answer to your *first* Letter. You may remember I then told you, that in the *manner* of your furious attack upon me, wholly unprovoked and unlooked for as it was on my part, and without the least notice given on your's, you had acted with the cowardice of the school-boy, who sculks from behind to give the first blow. You labored hard at that time to evade the charge. But in the part you have now adopted, you have taken the most effectual method to confirm it. For I appeal to any man who hath looked on during the whole of our battle, whether in this appeal of your's to the Bishop, you have not followed up the same dastardly spirit? For while reeking as you are under the smart of that chastisement, which your temerity and presumption have justly brought upon you, (and which you too plainly manifest to the public, from the foreness with which you write) like the school-boy well beaten, you now declare off to fight no more, and have run away to the master with the talc.

In the execution of this *pitiful* business of your's as an *Informer*, it is curious enough to observe, how undesignedly you have over-acted your part.

Your object was to say the *sweetest* things of the Bishop of Exeter, and the *bitterest* things of the Vicar of Charles. But in the attempt, though approaching his Lordship with such *sugary* words, as to a stomach of any delicacy is always disgusting, and to one more especially of his Lordship's taste, must, I think, have produced nausea; yet in your eagerness to load me with high crimes and misdemeanours, you were not aware what an indirect reproach you were thereby bringing on his Lordship's government. For on the supposition that I am really guilty of the irregularities with which you charge me, what doth this imply but that the Bishop must be very inattentive to what is going on in the Church, when it becomes necessary for the Vicar of a little obscure village, like that of Manaccan, to come forward to inform his Lordship of the proceedings in a parish of such magnitude and importance as that of Charles; situated as it is in the very centre of his Diocese, and by far in the most populous part of it.

But in this, as in many other instances, during this controversy, the fury of your resentment hath deprived

deprived you of the power of recollection, and hurried you into the greatest extravagancies.

But, Sir, you should be told, that my zeal in the best of causes, was not reserved for the Bishop's knowledge from *your* information. It is a point with which his Lordship hath been long acquainted. And in a letter which I had the honor to receive from him on the subject, prior to the first opening of this correspondence of your's with me, he was pleased to observe, that he was persuaded I was too well grounded in the principles which animated me in the discharge of my duty, not to be prepared to exert them through evil report as well as good report. And this, among other civil things, which his Lordship at that time thought proper to say to me was not in consequence of any servile adulation shewn by me towards his Lordship, but the free and spontaneous result of his own mind. I knew too well the deference due to the Bishop's rank not to be ready to give him suitable respect upon all occasions. But while I kept in view his dignity, I never lost sight of my own. Conscious that I had done nothing to offend, I felt equally conscious that I had nothing to fear. And as to the prospect of preferment, I am confident, that the Bishop, if ever he condescends to speak of the subject, will do me the justice to acknow-

ledge; that from the very commencement of our correspondence, I disclaimed all views of this kind. I begged his Lordship to understand, tho' in the most modest and least offensive manner I was able, (what to a man of Mr. Polwhele's complexion, must be marvellous indeed) that he had nothing to bestow in the way of preferment which I could accept. In the vicarage of Charles I had attained to the highest dignity I coveted in the present life. Yet, if in the discharge of the duties of my ministry I had committed a breach of the law, I should readily submit to whatever punishment that law prescribed.

And the same, Sir, I now tell *you*. I can have no conception that a life like mine, spent in the unremitting prosecution of the duties of my profession, can subject me to the *just* reproof of any man. I can form no possible idea that a total abstraction from the world, to attend to the more immediate calls of my ministry, can constitute a breach of any one law, or that I lay myself open thereby to the censure of any one court of judicature. It forms to my view indeed a new dictionary in language, which the dulness of my apprehension prevents me from understanding, that it is become a crime to fill up the intermediate hours which the *public* demands of my church do

not

not occupy, to the promotion of the same important purposes by *private* visitations among the people. I confess indeed, that in all this there is evidently a very strong *Nonconformity* to the conduct of *Writers of Religious Test Books*: and to *Men* who subscribe to doctrines which they have the unblushing confidence to tell the world they do not believe. But I am yet to learn, if it be so, that the English legislation hath an express flatute against such a nonconformity as mine.

But, Sir, it is possible I may mistake, for we live in an age of paradoxes. And I consider it to be no disgrace to my understanding to confess that my province is not to interpret the law, but to preach the gospel. And therefore, if there be a law existing which I have violated, let that law first be proved, and then let it take its course. No man alive, I will be proud to say, shall outdo me in the most *chearful* submission to all its just decisions. And no man alive shall be more forward to contend against all unjust encroachments of it. I make a nice, though but a proper distinction, between what is law, and what is opinion. Between (for instance) what is right, and what is Mr. Polwhele's ideas of what is right. I enter my warmest protest against all decisions of *private* opinion in a point of such magnitude as what interests the rights

rights of a British subject. And you may believe me sincere when I add, that I am too tenacious of those rights, from a proper appreciation of their value, to surrender them unheard or untried, into the hands of any man. Like one of old therefore I say, and upon the self-same occasion as he did, *if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death or of bonds, I refuse not to die.*--- But if on examination before my jurors it shall be found that my conduct is unimpeachable, I am too well apprized of the purity of my cause, and the upright administration of justice in the English Constitution, to fear the utmost malice of a Mr. Polwhele.

Leaving this point however as a question which belongs neither to your province or mine to decide, I would gladly advert to any other subject in this *third* Letter of your's by way of answer to it, if there were in reality any subject to answer. But unless I follow you through many pages up to the very neck in abuse, you have literally left me no other to go upon. From the investigation of the main point, the orthodoxy of my religious principles, which was made the original pretence for your attacking my character, you have uniformly shrank, and in its stead substituted nothing but personal invective.

Through

Through this part of your letter I must be excused from following you. For as I told you before, “*all the rage and fury of the correspondence shall be your's. I should blush if any Gentleman found occasion to reprove me for a single term in my Letters to you of falsehood and illiberality.*” And had you attended to what I said to you in my last reply, you might have spared yourself the trouble of compiling abuse from the writings of any other Painphleteer, by way of adding to your own. I have never to this hour read a single line, nor ever shall of such productions, either in your compilation, or in the original. And I venture to believe, that with all sensible minds, the reason which I have assigned in the 77th page of my Second Letter to you, hath proved sufficiently satisfactory. It is impossible, in the present state of things, to prevent those foul and untutored birds of the air, which sometimes hover over our heads, from letting fall the slime of their filthiness upon us. But it is beneath the dignity of the man to notice such occurrences.

I fear I shall again, however unitentionally, offend you in the bulk and price of this address.--- You were pleased to reprobate my *first* Letter because its contents were folded within a *three-penny pamphlet*. Whereas this, for want of subject, must be

be necessarily compressed within a smaller compass. And if my Printer charges more than *two-pence* for it he will much offend me. But as you have afforded me no opportunity to amplify my pages by the fair discussion of any point of theology, I have no alternative. For I cannot, I confess, imitate *your* method of annexing a Sermon to the end of it, which is totally irrelevant to the subject of our controversy, by way of *making a book*. Such may be among the *several reasons for which you have printed it*; but they neither of them come within my notions of what is right for imitation.

As from what you have intimated in this third Letter of your's, that it is the last favor of the kind with which you intend to honor me, I am to consider that you now decline the combat, and of consequence therefore my correspondence with you also must end.

But before I take a final leave of you, suffer me to remind you, that however our personal dispute may be over, the award of the past yet remains to be given. Do not forget, Sir, that there is an higher tribunal than the one which you have thought proper to bring the matter before, from whence the ultimate determination of our controversy must issue; and from whose decision there lies

lies no appeal. The hour is approaching, and perhaps to either of us not very far remote, when we shall both stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. At this tribunal every iota of our contest will be reheard. Both *my conduct* in the ministry (which you have thought proper to make the subject of ridicule) and the *real motives of your's*, (by which you have been influenced to the condemnation of it) will be brought forward to view, and scrutinized with a precision which will leave no room in the one to evade, or in the other to excuse.

While in the prospect of this awful day of God, I take shame to myself (as well I may) in the consciousness of the numerous deficiencies, neglects, imperfections, &c. which mark my very best services; and desire to lay low in the dust before God, under a deep sense of the sin and unworthiness which runs through all; my mind feels no apprehension in the prospect of the solemn events of that day from the whole of the charges which you have brought against me. My fears, believe me, do not arise from the *Enthusiasm* with which you think I am actuated; but from the *coldness* with which I am but too conscious I labor. Not for that my services have been marked with *Itinerancy*, but that I have not sought out as I ought *the sheep of Christ*, which

which are scattered abroad. And although a thorough conviction of unprofitableness on my part as it respects my ministry towards God, makes me anxious to renounce all ideas of merit in my final acceptance, and to rely wholly on the complete salvation which is in Christ Jesus: yet in my conduct as it concerns the other departments in the world, I have no cause to be *ashamed when I speak with my enemies in the gate.*

And be not offended, Sir, while taking a final leave of you, if I presume to make a parting request, that *you* will be as diligent to look into the motives of *your* conduct in this transaction as I have in *mine*. There is in every man's life a vacuity which the world can neither fill nor satisfy. In one of these retired hours sit down, Sir, I beseech you, and coolly consider the secret inducements and intentions for which you came forth to reprove me. Make the whole of this most extraordinary conduct of your's to pass in strict review before you. And in the anticipation of the great day of God which is to follow, judge fairly and dispassionately of what may be the final upshot of the whole.

Do not imagine however that I make this request from any personal consideration as it respects *my* feelings,

feelings, but as it concerns *your own*. If you knew how little inconvenience I have felt during the whole of this quarrel; or how trifling the interruptions arising from it hath been to a life like mine, (which I think it but gratitude to the Almighty Giver to say, is of equal happiness and cheerfulness to any man alive;) you would be convinced that it is wholly on *your account*, and not on *mine*, that I thus solicit your serious retrospect to the past.

The attack you have made upon *my* character is among the smallest of your offences in the present affair. It is of little consequence to me *now*; and will be still less and less *every hour*, whether Dr. H. be considered a Croud-catcher, an Itinerant, or Fanatic.

Your indiscriminate abuse of the *Methodists* is a much more serious object for your consideration.— Amidst so numerous a body of people as they are, and so generally harmless, as they are esteemed; it is astonishing to conceive through what inverted and discolored mediums you must have looked to have beheld them so horribly.

But both these circumstances of offence are trifling when compared to the conduct you have manifested respecting

respecting the great doctrines of the Gospel. The imagination cannot, in my esteem, contemplate an object more truly distressing than that of a Clergyman denying or disbelieving the whole operation of the Spirit of God in his Church, while obliged constantly to implore those aids in every ministration.

Were I disposed to recriminate—what a volume for materials is afforded me in the *Anecdotes* you have published; and the *Observations* another Writer hath since published upon them. But, Sir, your situation is such as disarms all resentment. In the very moment the hand is lifted up to chastise, the recollection of your present state and future prospect makes it nerveless.

The sincere wish of my heart is, that *God who alone can command the light to shine out of darkness, may shine in your heart*; and graciously give you to see the things which make for your everlasting peace before they are for ever hid from your eyes.

I am, Rev. Sir, &c.

ROBERT HAWKER.